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THE GUILT OF THE PAGAN.

A SERMON

BY

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WILLIAM G. T. SHEDD, D. D.



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THE GUILT OF THE PAGAN.

A SERMON:¹

BY WILLIAM G. T. SHEDD, D. D.

“They are without excuse; because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind.”—ROMANS i. 20, 21, 28.

UNLESS the *guilt* of the pagan world can be proved, the missionary enterprises of the Christian church, from the days of the Apostles to the present time, have all been a waste of labor. Nay more, if the sin and ill-desert of the entire human race, in all its generations, can not be established, then the Christian religion itself, involving the incarnation of God, is an attempt to supply a demand that has no real existence. Both theoretical and practical Christianity stands or falls with the doctrine of the universal guilt of man. It is no wonder, therefore, that the apostle Paul, in the opening of the most systematic and logical treatise in the New Testament, — the Epistle to the Romans, — enters upon a line of argument to demonstrate the ill-desert of every human creature without exception, and to prove that before an unerring tribunal, and in the final day of adjudication, “every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God.”²

¹ This Sermon was preached before the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church, May 3, 1863. As the Prudential Committee consider such a discussion exceedingly important, at the present time, they have requested permission to publish it for the benefit of many who might not otherwise see it; which the author has kindly granted.

² Rom. iii. 19.

In conducting his argument, the apostle relies upon two facts, in particular, to establish his position. The first is, that however dim or imperfect man's knowledge of God and the moral law may be, he nevertheless knows more than he puts in practice. Of the millions of idolaters in cultivated Greece and Rome, and the millions of idolaters in that barbaric world which lay outside of the Græco-Roman civilization, he affirms, that they "are without excuse; because that when they *knew* God, they glorified him not as God." And the second fact upon which he founds his charge of guilt is, that the dim perception of God and the moral law, as well as the idolatrous notions that were formed upon these subjects, both alike originated in the wicked inclination of the heart. These pagans, he says, "*did not like* to retain God in their knowledge," and, therefore, "God gave them over to a reprobate mind." The apostle vindicates the ways of God in the condemnation of man, because human conscience, be it much or little, is always in advance of human character; and, also, because all the various forms of human error respecting the divine being and attributes, all the idolatry and superstition of the barbaric races of mankind, originate not in man's created and rational constitution, but in the sin of his apostate and corrupt heart. These two facts, in the judgment of St. Paul, justify the damnation of the heathen; and to their examination we now proceed, under the light of St. Paul's inspiration and reasoning.

I. The idea of God is the most important and comprehensive of all the ideas of which the human mind is possessed. It is the foundation of religion, of all right doctrine, and all right conduct. A correct intuition of it leads to correct religious theories and practice; while any erroneous or defective view of the Supreme Being will pervade the whole domain of religion, and exert a most pernicious influence upon the character and conduct of men. It is this great idea of the Deity, inborn and constitutional to the human mind, which St. Paul seizes; and he flashes its penetrating light into the recesses

of the pagan heart. He traces back the horrible depravity of the heathen world, which he depicts with a pen as sharp as that of Juvenal, but with none of Juvenal's bitterness and vitriolic sarcasm, to a distorted and false conception of the divine being and attributes.

But he does not, for an instant, concede that this distorted and false conception is founded in the original structure and constitution of the human soul, and that this moral ignorance is necessary and inevitable to the pagan. This mutilated idea of the Supreme Being was not inlaid in the rational creature, on that morning of creation, when God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." On the contrary, the apostle affirms, that in the moral constitution of a rational soul, and in the works of creation and providence, the Creator has given to all men the media to a correct idea of himself, and asserts, by implication, that if they had always employed these media, they would have always possessed this idea. "The wrath of God," he says, "is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness, *because*, that which may be known of God¹ is manifest *in* them, for God hath showed it unto them. *For* the invisible things of Him, even His eternal power and godhead, are clearly seen from the creation of the world, being understood by the things that are made, so that they are without excuse; *because* that when they *knew* God they glorified him not as God."² This is said, be it remembered, of the pagan world; and from this reasoning it appears that the pagan mind has not kept what was committed to it. It has not employed the moral instrumentalities, nor elicited the moral truths with which it has been furnished. This reasoning implies that the pagan man by his constitutional structure knows more of his Maker than he puts in practice; that he possesses a talent which he hides in the earth; that he has a pound which he keeps laid up in a napkin.

¹ Τὸ γνωστόν, the knowable [scible] in God; all that the finite can comprehend of the Infinite.

² Rom. i. 18-21.

When Napoleon was returning from his campaign in Egypt and Syria, he was seated one night upon the deck of the vessel under the open canopy of the heavens, surrounded by his captains and generals. The conversation had taken a skeptical direction, and most of the party had combated the doctrine of the Divine Existence. Napoleon sat silent and musing, apparently taking no interest in the discussion, when suddenly raising his hand, and pointing at the crystalline firmament, crowded with its mildly-shining planets and its keen glittering stars, he broke out, in those startling tones that so often electrified a million of men: "Gentlemen, who made all that?" The "eternal power and godhead" of the Creator are impressed by "the things that are made;" and these words of Napoleon to his atheistic captains silenced them. And the same impression is made the world over. Go to-day into the heart of Africa, or into the center of New Holland; select the most imbruted pagan that can be found; take him out under a clear starlit heaven, and ask him who made all that, and the idea of a Superior Being, — superior to all his fetishes and idols, — possessing eternal power and godhead, immediately emerges in his consciousness. The instant the missionary takes this lustful idolater away from the circle of his idols, and brings him face to face with the heavens and the earth, as Napoleon brought his captains, the constitutional idea dawns again, and the pagan trembles before the unseen Power.¹

¹ The early Fathers, in their defense of the Christian doctrine of one God, against the objections of the pagan advocate of the popular mythologies, contend that the better pagan writers themselves agree with the new religion, in teaching that there is one Supreme Being. *Lactantius* (*Institutiones* i. 5), after quoting the Orphic poets, Hesiod, Virgil, and Ovid, in proof that the heathen poets taught the unity of the supreme deity, proceeds to show that the better pagan philosophers, also, agree with them in this. "Aristotle," he says, "although he disagrees with himself, and says many things that are self-contradictory, yet testifies that one supreme mind rules over the world. Plato, who is regarded as the wisest philosopher of them all, plainly and openly defends the doctrine of a divine monarchy, and denominates the Supreme Being, not ether, nor reason, nor nature, but, as he is, *God*; and asserts that by him this perfect and admirable world was made. And Cicero follows Plato, frequently confessing the Deity, and calls him the Supreme Being, in his treatise on the Laws." *Tertullian* (*De test. an.* c. 1; *adv. Marc.* i. 10; *ad Scap.* c. 2;

But it will be objected that it is a very dim and inadequate idea of the Deity that thus rises in the pagan's mind, and that, therefore, the apostle's affirmation that he is "without excuse" for being an idolater and a sensualist needs some qualification. This imbruted creature, says the objector, certainly does not possess the metaphysical conception of God as a Spirit, and of all his various attributes, like the dweller in Christendom. How then can he be brought in guilty before the same eternal bar, and be condemned to the same eternal death, with the nominal Christian? The answer is plain, and decisive, and derivable out of the apostle's own

Apol. c. 17), than whom no one of the Christian Fathers was more vehemently opposed to the philosophizing of the schools, earnestly contends that the doctrine of the unity of God is constitutional to the human mind. "God," he says, "proves himself to be God, and the one only God, by the very fact that he is known to *all* nations; for the existence of any other deity than he would first have to be demonstrated. The God of the Jews is the one whom the *souls* of men call their God. We worship one God, the one whom ye all naturally know, at whose lightnings and thunders ye tremble, at whose benefits ye rejoice. Will ye that we prove the divine existence by the witness of the soul itself, which, although confined by the prison of the body, although circumscribed by bad training, although enervated by lusts and passions, although made the servant of false gods, yet when it recovers itself as from a surfeit, as from a slumber, as from some infirmity, and is in its proper condition of soundness, it calls God by *this* name only, because it is the proper name of the true God. 'Great God,' 'good God,' and 'God grant,' [*deus*, not *dii*] are words in every mouth. The soul also witnesses that He is its judge, when it says, 'God sees,' 'I commend to God,' 'God shall recompense me.' O testimony of a soul naturally Christian [*i. e.*, monotheistic]! Finally, in pronouncing these words, it looks not to the Roman capitol, but to heaven; for it knows the dwelling-place of the true God: from him and from thence it descended." Calvin (Inst. I. 10) seems to have had these statements in his eye, in the following remarks: "In almost all ages, religion has been generally corrupted. It is true, indeed, that the name of one Supreme God has been universally known and celebrated. For those who used to worship a multitude of deities, whenever they spake according to the genuine sense of nature, used simply the name of God in the *singular* number, as though they were contented with one God. And this was wisely remarked by Justin Martyr, who for this purpose wrote a book 'On the Monarchy of God,' in which he demonstrates, from numerous testimonies, that the unity of God was a principle universally impressed on the hearts of men. Tertullian (*De Idololatria*) also proves the same point from the common phraseology. But since all men, without exception, have become vain in their understandings, all their natural perception of the divine unity has only served to render them inexcusable." In consonance with these views, the Presbyterian *Confession of Faith* (ch. i.) affirms that "the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God as to leave men inexcusable."

statements. In order to establish the guiltiness of a rational creature before the bar of God, it is not necessary to show that he has lived in the seventh heavens, and under a blaze of moral intelligence like that of the archangel Gabriel. It is only necessary to show that he has enjoyed *some* degree of moral light, and that *he has not lived up to it*. Any creature who knows more than he practices, is a guilty creature. If the light in the pagan's intellect concerning God and the moral law, small though it be, is yet actually in advance of the inclination and affections of his heart and the actions of his life, he deserves to be punished like any and every other creature under the divine government of whom the same thing is true. Grades of knowledge vary indefinitely. No two men upon the planet, no two men in Christendom itself, possess precisely the same degree of moral intelligence. There are men walking the streets of this city to-day, under the full light of the Christian revelation, whose notions respecting God and law are exceedingly dim and inadequate; and there are others whose views are clear and accurate in a high degree. But there is not a person in this city, young or old, ignorant or cultivated, in the purlieus of vice or in the saloons of wealth, whose knowledge of God is not in advance of his character. Ask the young thief, in the subterranean haunts of vice and crime, if he does not know more of moral truth than he puts in practice, and, if he renders an honest answer, it is in the affirmative. Ask the most besotted soul, immersed and petrified in pleasure, if his career upon earth has been in accordance with his own knowledge and conviction of what is right and required by his Maker, and he will answer no, if he answers truly. This is the condemnation, that light, in varying degrees it is true, but always in some degree, falls upon the pathway of every man, but he loves darkness rather than light, because his heart and deeds are evil.

And this principle will be applied to the pagan world in the day of the great winding up of human history. It is so applied by St. Paul. He himself concedes that the Gentile has not enjoyed all the advantages of the Jew, and argues

that the ungodly Jew will be visited with a more severe punishment than the ungodly Gentile. But he expressly affirms that *the pagan is under law*, and *knows* that he is; that he shows the work of the law that is written in his heart, his conscience also bearing witness, and his thoughts the meanwhile accusing him.¹ But the knowledge of the law implies the knowledge of *God* in an equal degree. Who can feel himself amenable to a moral law, without at the same time thinking of its Author? The law and the Lawgiver are indivisible. The one is the mirror and index of the other. If the eye opens dimly upon the commandment, it opens dimly upon the Sovereign; if it sees eternal right and law with clear and celestial vision, it then looks directly into the face of God. Law and God are correlative to each other; and just so far, consequently, as the heathen understands the law that is written on the heart, does he apprehend the Being who sitteth upon the circle of the heavens, and who impinges himself upon the consciousness of man. This being so, it is plain that we can confront the ungodly pagan with the same charge of guilt before the Eternal Judge with which we confront the ungodly nominal Christian. We can tell him with positiveness, wherever we find him, be it under the burning zone of Africa or in the frozen home of the Esquimaux, that he knows more than he puts in practice. We will concede to him that the quantum of his moral knowledge is very stinted and meager; but in the same breath we will remind him that, small as it is, he has not lived up to it; that he, too, has "come short;" that he, too, knowing God in the dimmest, faintest degree, has yet not glorified him as God in the slightest, faintest manner. The Bible sends the ungodly and licentious pagan to hell upon the same principle that it sends the ungodly and licentious nominal Christian. It is the just principle enunciated by our Lord Christ, the judge of quick and dead, when he says, "He who knew his master's will [clearly], and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes; and he who knew not his master's will [clearly, but

¹ Rom. ii. 15.

knew it dimly], and did it not, shall be beaten with few stripes." It is the just principle enunciated by St. Paul, that "as many as have sinned without law [*ἀνόμους*, without *written law*] shall also *perish* without law."¹

The present and future condition of the heathen world is a subject that has enlisted the interest of two very different classes of men. The church of God has pondered, and labored, and prayed over this subject, and will continue to do so till the millennium. And the disbeliever in revelation has also turned his mind to the consideration of this black mass of ignorance and misery which welters upon the globe like a chaotic ocean; these teeming millions of barbarians and savages who render the aspect of the world so sad and so dark. The church, we need not say, have accepted the biblical theory, and have traced the wretched condition of the pagan world, as St. Paul does, to their sin and transgression. They have held that every pagan is a rational creature, and by virtue of this fact has known something of the moral law; and that, to the extent of the knowledge he has had, he is as guilty for the transgression of law, and as really under its condemnation, as the dweller under the light of revelation and civilization. They have maintained that every human creature has enjoyed sufficient light, in the workings of natural reason and conscience, and in the impressions that are made by the glory and the terror of the natural world above and around him, to bring him in guilty before the Everlasting Judge. For this reason, the church has denied that the pagan is an innocent creature, or that he can stand in the judgment before the Searcher of hearts. For this reason, the church has believed the declaration of the apostle John, that "the *whole* world lieth in wickedness,"² and has endeavored to obey the command of Him who came to redeem pagans as much as nominal Christians, to go and preach the gospel to *every* creature, because every creature is a guilty creature.

¹ Luke xii. 47, 48; Rom. ii. 12. The word *ἀπολούνται* in Rom. ii. 12, is opposed to the *σωτηρία* spoken of in Rom. i. 16, and signifies *eternal destruction*.

² John v. 19.

But the disbeliever in revelation adopts the theory of human innocency, and looks upon all the ignorance and wretchedness of paganism as he does upon the suffering, decay, and death in the vegetable and animal world. It is the necessary condition, he asserts, of all created existence; and as decay and death in the vegetable and animal worlds only result in a more luxuriant vegetation, and an increased multiplication of living creatures, so the evils and woes of the hundreds of generations, and the millions of individuals, during the sixty centuries that have elapsed since the origin of man, will all of them minister to the ultimate and everlasting weal of the race. There is no need, therefore, he maintains, of endeavoring to save such feeble and ignorant beings from judicial condemnation and eternal penalty. Such finiteness and helplessness can not be put into relations to such an awful attribute as the eternal nemesis of God. Can it be, he asks, that the millions upon millions that have been born, lived their brief hour, enjoyed their little joys and suffered their sharp sorrows, and then dropped into "the dark backward and abysm of time," have really been *guilty* creatures, and have gone down to an endless hell?

But what does all this reasoning and querying imply? Will the objector really take the position, and stand to it, that the pagan man is not a rational and responsible creature? that he does not possess sufficient knowledge of moral truth to justify his being brought to the bar of judgment? Will he say that the population that knew enough to build the pyramids did not know enough to break the law of God? Will he affirm that the civilization of Babylon and Nineveh, of Greece and Rome, did not contain within it enough of moral intelligence to constitute a foundation for future rewards and punishments? Will he tell us that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah stood upon the same plane with the brutes that perish, and the trees of the field that rot and die, having no idea of God, knowing nothing of the distinction between right and wrong, and never feeling the pains of an accusing conscience? Will he maintain that the populations of India,

in the midst of whom one of the most subtle and ingenious systems of pantheism has sprung up with the luxuriance and involutions of one of their own jungles, and which has enervated the whole religious sentiment of the Hindoo race as opium has enervated their physical frame, — will he maintain that such an untiring and persistent mental activity as this is incapable of apprehending the first principles of ethics and natural religion, which, in comparison with the complicated and obscure ratiocinations of Boodhism, are clear as water, and lucid as atmospheric air? In other connections, this theorist does not speak in this style. In other connections, and for a different purpose, he enlarges upon the dignity of man, of every man, and eulogizes the power of reason which so exalts him in the scale of being. With Hamlet, he dilates in proud and swelling phrase: “What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving, how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!” It is from that very class of theorizers who deny that the heathen are in danger of eternal perdition, and who represent the whole missionary enterprise as a work of supererogation, that we receive the most extravagant accounts of the natural powers and gifts of man. Now, if these powers and gifts do belong to human nature by its constitution, they certainly lay a foundation for responsibility; and all such theorists must be able to show that the pagan has made a right use of them, and has thought and acted in conformity with this large amount of truth and reason, with which, according to their own statement, he is endowed, or else they consign him, as St. Paul does, to “the wrath of God which is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men *who hold the truth in unrighteousness.*” If you assert that the pagan man has had no talents at all committed to him, and can prove your assertion, you are consistent in denying that he can be summoned to the bar of God, and be tried for everlasting life or death. But if you concede that he has had one talent, or two talents

committed to his charge; and still more, if you exaggerate his gifts, and endow him with five or ten talents; then it is impossible for you to save him from the retributions to come, except you can prove a *perfect* administration and use of the trust.¹

II. And this brings us to the consideration of the second fact upon which St. Paul rests his position that the pagan world is in a state of condemnation. He concedes that man outside of the pale of revelation is characterized, not indeed by *total*, but by great ignorance of God and divine things; that his moral knowledge is exceedingly dim and highly distorted. But the fault is in himself that it is so. "As they *did not like to retain God in their knowledge*, God gave them over to a reprobate mind."

The question very naturally arises, and is frequently urged by the unbeliever, How comes it to pass that the knowledge of God, of which the apostle speaks, and which he affirms to be innate and constitutional to the human mind, should become so vitiated in the pagan world? The majority of mankind are polytheists and idolaters, and have been for thousands of years. Can it be that St. Paul is correct in affirming that the doctrine that there is only one God is native to the human mind,—that the pagan "*knows*" this God, and yet does not glorify him as God? The majority of mankind are earthly and sensual, and have been for thousands of years. Can it be that St. Paul is correct in saying that there is a moral law written upon their heart, forbidding such carnality, and enjoining purity and holiness? Some theorizers argue that because the pagan man does not

¹ Infidelity is constantly changing its ground. In the 18th century, the skeptic very generally took the position of Lord Herbert of Cherbury, and maintained that the light of reason is very clear, and is adequate to all the religious needs of the soul. In the 19th century, he is now passing to the other extreme, and contending that man is kindred to the ape, and within the sphere of paganism does not possess sufficient moral intelligence to constitute him responsible. Like Luther's drunken beggar on horseback, the opponent of revelation sways from the position that man is a god, to the position that he is a chimpanzee.

obey the law, therefore he does not know the law; and that because he has not revered and worshiped the one Supreme Deity, therefore he does not possess the idea of such a Being. They look out upon the pagan populations, and see them bowing down to stocks and stones, and witness their immersion in the abominations of heathenism, and conclude that these millions of rational beings really know no better, and that therefore it is unjust to hold them responsible for their polytheism and moral corruption. But why do they confine this species of reasoning to the pagan world? why do they not bring it into nominal Christendom, and apply it there? Why does not this theorist go into the midst of European civilization, — into the heart of London or Paris, — and gauge the moral knowledge of the sensualist by the moral character of the sensualist? Why does he not tell us that because this civilized man acts no better, that therefore he knows no better? Why does he not maintain that because this voluptuary breaks all the commandments in the decalogue, therefore he must be ignorant of all the commandments in the decalogue? that because he neither fears nor loves the one only God, therefore he does not know that there is any such Being?

It will never do to estimate man's moral knowledge by man's moral character. He knows more than he practices. And there is not so much difference in this particular between some men in nominal Christendom, and some men in Heathendom, as is sometimes imagined. The moral knowledge of those who lie in the lower strata of Christian civilization, and those who lie in the higher strata of Paganism, is probably not so very far apart. Place the imbruted outcasts of our metropolitan population beside the Indian hunter, with his belief in the Great Spirit, and his worship without images or pictorial representations;¹ beside the stalwart Mandingo of the high table lands of Central Africa, with his active and en-

¹ "There are no profane words in the (Iowa) Indian language; no light or profane way of speaking of the 'Great Spirit.'" — *Foreign Missionary*, May, 1863, p. 337.

terprising spirit, carrying on manufactures and trade with all the keenness of any civilized worldling; beside the native merchants and lawyers of Calcutta, who still cling to their ancestral Boodhism, or else substitute French infidelity in its place; place the lowest of the highest beside the highest of the lowest, and tell us if the difference is so very marked. Sin, like holiness, is a mighty leveler. The "dislike to retain God" in the consciousness; the aversion of the heart toward the purity of the moral law, vitiates the native perceptions alike in Christendom and Paganism.

The theory that the pagan is possessed of such an amount and degree of moral knowledge as has been specified has awakened some apprehensions in the minds of some Christian theologians, and has led them unintentionally to foster the opposite theory, which, if strictly adhered to, would lift off all responsibility from the pagan world, would bring them in innocent at the bar of God, and would render the whole enterprise of Christian missions a superfluity and an absurdity. Their motive has been good. They have feared to attribute any degree of accurate knowledge of God and the moral law to the pagan world, lest they should thereby conflict with the doctrine of total depravity. They have erroneously supposed that if they should concede to every man, by virtue of his moral constitution, some correct apprehensions of ethics and natural religion, it would follow that there is some native goodness in him. But light in the intellect is very different from life and affection in the heart. It is one thing to know the law of God, and quite another thing to obey it. Even if we should concede to the degraded pagan, or the degraded dweller in the haunts of vice in Christian lands, all the intellectual knowledge of God and the moral law that is possessed by the ruined archangel himself, we should not be adding a particle to his moral character or his moral excellence. There is nothing of a holy quality in the mere intellectual perception that there is one Supreme Being, and that he has issued a pure and holy law for the guidance of all rational creatures. The mere doctrine of the Divine

Unity will save no man. There is no *redemptive* power in it. It forgives no sin, and it delivers from no bondage to sin. "Thou believest," says St. James, "that there is one God; thou doest well; the devils also believe and tremble." Satan himself is a monotheist, and knows very clearly all the commandments of God; but his heart and will are in demoniacal antagonism with them. And so it is, only in a lower degree, in the instance of the pagan and of the natural man in every age and in every clime. This intellectual perception, therefore, this constitutional apprehension of the first principles of natural religion, instead of lifting up *disobedient* man into a higher and more favorable position before the eternal bar, casts him down to a deeper perdition. Light that is abused ministers to a greater condemnation; and the Eternal Judge will say to every man, Jew or Gentile, that has held any portion or degree of moral truth in unrighteousness, as his apostle said to the unfaithful Jew: "Thou therefore that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery?"¹ If the heathen knew nothing at all of his Maker and his duty, he could not be held responsible, and would not be summoned to judgment. As St. Paul affirms: "Where there is no law, there is no transgression." But if when he knew God in some degree, he glorified him not as God to that degree; and if, when the moral law was written upon his heart, he went counter to its requirements, and actually heard the accusing voice of his own conscience after so doing, then his mouth must be stopped, and he must become guilty before his Judge, like any and every other disobedient creature.

It is this serious and damning fact in the history of man upon the globe, that St. Paul brings to view, in the affirmation that the pagan world "*did not like to retain* God in their knowledge." He accounts for all the idolatry and sensuality, all the darkness and vain imaginations of paganism, by referring them to *the aversion of the natural heart*. The primary

¹ Rom. ii. 21, 22.

difficulty was in the affections of the pagan, and not in his understanding. He knew too much for his own comfort in sin. The contrast between the divine purity that was mirrored in his conscience, and the sinfulness that was wrought into his heart and will, rendered this inborn constitutional idea of God a painful one. It was a fire in the bones. If the Psalmist, a renewed man, yet not entirely free from human corruption, could say : “ I thought of God, and was troubled,” much more must the totally depraved man of paganism be filled with terror, when in the thoughts of his heart, in the hour when the accusing conscience was at work, he brought to mind the one great God of gods, the vast unseen Power, whom he did not glorify, and whom he had offended. It was no wonder, therefore, that he did not like to retain the idea of such a being in his consciousness, and that he adopted all possible expedients to get rid of it. The apostle informs us that the pagan actually called in his *imagination* to his aid, in order to extirpate, if possible, all his native and rational ideas and convictions upon religious subjects. He became vain in his imaginations, and his foolish heart, as a consequence, was darkened, and he changed the glory of the incorruptible God, the spiritual unity of the Deity, into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.¹ He invented idolatry, and all those “ gay religions full of pomp and gold,” in order to blunt the edge of that sharp, spiritual conception of God, which was continually cutting and lacerating his wicked and his sensual heart. Hiding himself amidst the columns of his idolatrous temples, and under the smoke of his idolatrous incense, he thought, like Adam, to escape from the view and inspection of that Infinite One, who from the creation of the world downward makes known to all men his eternal power and godhead ;² who, as St. Paul taught the philosophers of Athens, is not far from any one of his rational creatures ;³ who, as the same apostle taught the pagan Lycaonians, though in time past he

¹ Rom. i. 21-23.² Rom. i. 20.³ Acts xvii. 27.

suffered all nations to walk in their own ways, *yet left not himself without witness*, in that he did good, and gave them rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness.¹

The first step in the process of mutilating the original idea of God as a unity and an invisible Spirit, is seen in those pantheistic religions which lie behind all the mythologies of the ancient world, like a nebulous vapor, out of which the more distinct idols and images of paganism are struggling. Here, the notion of the divine unity is still preserved; but the divine personality and holiness are lost. God becomes a vague impersonal power, with no moral qualities, and no religious attributes; and it is difficult to say which is worst in its moral influence, this pantheism which, while retaining the doctrine of the divine unity, yet denudes the Deity of all that renders him an object of love and reverence, or the grosser idolatries that succeeded it. For man can not love, with all his mind and heart and soul and strength, a vast force working blindly through infinite space, and everlasting time.

And the second and last stage in the process of vitiating the true idea of God appears in that polytheism in the midst of which St. Paul lived, and labored, and preached, and died; in that seductive and beautiful paganism, that classical idolatry, which still addresses the human taste in such a fascinating manner in the Venus de Medici and the Apollo Belvidere. The idea of the unity of God is now mangled and cut up into the "gods many," and the "lords many;" into the thirty thousand divinities of the pagan pantheon. This completes the process. God now gives his guilty creature over to those vain imaginations of naturalism, sensualism, and idolatry, and to an increasingly darkening mind, until in the lowest forms of heathenism he so distorts and suppresses the concreated idea of the Deity, that some speculatists assert that it does not belong to his constitution, and that his Maker never endowed him with it. How is the gold become dim! How is the most fine gold changed!

¹ Acts xiv. 16, 17.

But it will be objected that all this lies in the past. This is the account of a process that has required centuries, yea millenniums, to bring about. A hundred generations have been engaged in transmuting the monotheism with which the human race started, into the pantheism and polytheism in which the great majority of it is now involved. How do you establish the guilt of those at the end of the line? How can you charge upon the present generation of pagans the same culpability that Paul imputed to their ancestors eighteen centuries ago, and that Noah the preacher of righteousness denounced upon the antediluvian pagan? As the deteriorating process advances, does not the guilt diminish? and now, in these ends of the ages, and in these dark habitations of cruelty, has not the culpability run down to a minimum, which God in the day of judgment will "wink at"?

We answer *no*; because, in the first place, the structure of the human mind is precisely the same that it was when the Sodomites held down the truth in unrighteousness, and the Roman populace turned up their thumbs that they might see the last drops of blood ebb slowly from the red gash in the dying gladiator's side. Man, in his deepest degradation, in his most hardened depravity, is still a rational intelligence; and though he should continue to sin on indefinitely, through cycles of time as long as those of geology, he can not unmake himself; he can not unmold his immortal essence, and absolutely eradicate all his moral ideas. Even paganism itself has its fluctuations of moral knowledge. The early Roman, in the days of Numa, was highly ethical in his views of the Deity, and his conceptions of moral law. Varro informs us that for a period of one hundred and seventy years the Romans worshiped their gods without any images;¹ and Salust denominates these pristine Romans "*religiosissimi mortales*." And how often does the missionary discover a tribe, or a race, whose moral intelligence is higher than that of the average of paganism. Nay, the same race, or tribe, passes from one phase of polytheism to another; in one in-

¹ *Varro*, apud *Plutarch.*, Numa, 8; *Augustine*, *De Civitate Dei*, IV. xxxi.

stance exhibiting many of the elements and truths of natural religion, and in another almost entirely suppressing them. These facts prove that the pagan man is under supervision; that he is under the righteous despotism of moral ideas and convictions; that God is not far from him; that he lives and moves and has his being in his Maker; and that God does not leave himself without witness in his constitutional structure. Therefore it is, that this sea of rational intelligence thus surges and sways in the masses of paganism; sometimes dashing the creature up the heights, and sometimes sending him down into the depths.

But we answer *no*, to the question that is put by the objector, for a second reason that is still more conclusive, because it is still more practical. The guilt of the pagan can not be reduced to a minimum and disappear, because, wherever he is found, he is found to be *self-willed* and *determined* in sin. He does not *like* to retain truth in his mind, or to obey it in his heart. Go into the center of Africa to-day; select out the most imbruted heathen; bring to his remembrance that class of truths with which he is already acquainted, and add to them the still larger class that issue from revelation, and you will find that he is predetermined against them. He takes sides with all the depth and intensity of his being, with that sinfulness which is common to man, and which it is the object of both ethics and the gospel to oppose and remove. This pagan *loves* the sin which is forbidden, more than he loves the holiness that is commanded. We grant that the temptations that assail him are very powerful; but are not some of the temptations that beset any and every man very powerful? We grant that this wretched slave of vice and pollution can not possibly break off his sins by righteousness, without the renewing and sanctifying grace of God; but neither can any man in the heart of Christendom. He loves his chains and his bondage, even as every other sinner loves them; and this proves that his moral corruption is the same self-willed thing in principle with that of mankind in every age and grade of civilization. It is the rooted aversion of

the human heart toward the purity and holiness of God; it is "the carnal mind which is at enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."¹

Ask the faithful and devoted missionaries who go down into these habitations of cruelty to pour more light into the mind, and to induce the pagan to leave his idols and his sensualism; ask them if they find that sinful human nature is any different there, from what it is elsewhere, so far as yielding to the claims of God and law is concerned. Do they tell you that they are uniformly successful in persuading these sinners to leave their sins? that they never find any self-will, any determined opposition to the holy law of purity, any preference of a life of license, with its woes here upon earth, and hereafter in hell, to a life of self-denial with its joys eternal? On the contrary, they testify that the old maxim upon which so many millions of the human family in nominal Christendom act, — "Enjoy the present, and jump the life to come," — is the rule for the mass of the heathen population, of whom so few can be persuaded to leave their idols and their lusts. Like the people of Israel, when expostulated with by the prophet Jeremiah for their idolatry and pollution, the majority of the pagan world, when endeavors have been made to reclaim them, have said to the missionary: "There is no hope; no, for I have loved strangers, and after them I will go."² There is not a single individual of them all who has been necessitated to do wrong. Each one of them has a will of his own, and loves the sin that is destroying him more than he loves the holiness that would save him. Notwithstanding all the horrible accompaniments of sin in heathen society, the wretched creature prefers to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season rather than come out and separate himself from the unclean thing, and begin that holy warfare and obedience to which his God and Saviour invite him. This, we repeat, proves that the sin is not forced upon the rational creature. For if he hated his sin, nay, if he felt weary and heavy-laden because of it, he would leave it. The Christian

¹ Rom. viii. 7.

² Jer. ii. 25.

missionary announces a free grace, and a proffered assistance of the Holy Ghost, of which he may avail himself at any moment. Had he the feeling of the weary and penitent prodigal, the same father's house is ever open for his return, and the same father seeing him on his return, though yet a great way off, would run and fall upon his neck and kiss him. But the heart is hard, and the spirit is utterly *selfish*, and the will is perverse and determined, and therefore the natural knowledge of God and his law which this sinner possesses by his very constitution, and the added knowledge which the efforts of benevolent Christians have imparted to him, are not strong enough to overcome his inclination and induce him to break off his sins by righteousness. To him, also, as well as to every sin-loving man, these solemn words will be spoken in the day of final adjudication: "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men who hold down (*κατεχειν*) the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest *within* them; for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him, even his eternal power and godhead, are clearly seen from the creation of the world, being understood by the things that are made; so that they are without excuse, because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God."

The subject which we have thus discussed is exceedingly fertile in its inferences and teachings; but we shall limit ourselves to two, that have a direct bearing upon the enterprise of Foreign Missions.

1. In the first place, it is evident that if the positions that have been taken are correct, natural religion consigns the entire pagan world to eternal perdition.

Strictly speaking, it is not Christianity that sends the race of mankind to hell, but it is ethics. Christ himself says that *He* came not into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through *Him* might be saved.¹ Men are condemned *already*, previous to redemption, by the law written on their hearts; by their natural convictions of moral truth; by natural

¹ John iii. 17.

religion, whose truths and dictates they have failed to put in practice. Those theorists, therefore, who reject revealed religion, and remand man back to the first principles of ethics and morality as the only religion that he needs, send him to a tribunal that damns him. "Tell me," says St. Paul, "ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? The law is not of faith, but the man that *doeth* them shall live by them."¹ "Circumcision verily profiteth if thou *keep* the law; but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision."² If man had been true to all the principles and precepts of natural religion, it would indeed be religion enough for him. But he has not been thus true. The entire list of vices and sins recited by St. Paul in the first chapter of Romans is as contrary to natural religion as it is to revealed. And it is precisely because the pagan world has not obeyed the principles of natural religion, and is under a curse and a bondage therefor, that it is in perishing need of the truths of revealed religion. Little do those know what they are saying, when they propose to find a salvation for the pagan in the mere light of natural reason and conscience. What pagan has ever realized the truths of natural conscience in his inward character and his outward life? What pagan is there in all the generations that will not be found guilty before the bar of natural religion? What heathen will not need an atonement for his failure to live up even to the light of nature? Nay, what is the entire sacrificial cultus of heathenism, but a confession that the whole heathen world finds and feels itself to be guilty at the bar of natural reason and conscience? The accusing voice within them wakes their forebodings and fearful looking-for of divine judgment, and they endeavor to propitiate the offended power by their offerings and sacrifices.

2. In the second place, it follows inevitably from these positions of St. Paul, concerning the guilt of the pagan, that nothing but revealed religion can save him from an eternity of sin and woe.

Our Lord Jesus Christ well knew the significance of his

¹ Gal. iv. 21; iii. 12.

² Rom. ii. 25.

last command to his apostles and his church, to go into all the world and preach the *gospel* to every creature. He knew what a measure and degree of moral truth had been wrought into the structure of the millions of mankind. He knew that there is a light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.¹ He knew that that truth had been held in unrighteousness, and that that light had shined in the darkness that comprehended it not. He knew that upon the plane of natural religion and conscience the responsible creature stood a guilty criminal; that he was without excuse; that he was utterly unsheltered, and must be pierced through and through by the glittering shafts of the law which he had known and which he had violated. The incarnation of the eternal Son of God is utterly unintelligible, except upon the supposition that every human creature is a guilty creature; and this guilt is inconceivable except upon the supposition, that when he knew God he glorified him not as God.

It is this dark and awful fact which the church of Christ is continually to keep in mind. The whole world lieth in wickedness,² and wickedness is crime, and crime must either be cancelled by the blood of the God-man or be punished through endless ages. We are summoned to take the same view of this wretched and sinful world which the Founder of Christianity took. We are to look through his eyes, and breathe his spirit. His eyes are a flame of fire, and pierce through all the self-deceptions by which man would extenuate or nullify his sin; and his spirit is that of self-sacrificing love to the guilty. If the Man of Sorrows saw in the mass of mankind a mass of perdition, his followers must see the same. If, in the midst of all his tenderness and self-sacrificing love for the human soul, he never uttered a single word that leads us to suppose that that soul merits any thing but hell-punishment, or will receive any thing but this, if it stands upon its own merits in the day of judgment; if the pitiful Son of God and Son of Man, in all his various representations of the eternal future, never spoke a syllable that can be tortured into the

¹ John i. 9.

² 1 John v. 19.

theory of the innocency of any human being, be he Jew or Gentile, barbarian, Scythian, bond or free, young or old; then the disciple is to be as the Master. The church of Christ must look out upon the millions of India, China, and Africa, as the Son of God looked down upon them from the heights of the eternal throne, and must behold in them millions upon millions of guilty and lost moral agents. Like him, they must engage in efforts for their salvation, and not waste their energies in futile queryings and doubtings. The problems before the Eternal Mind respecting the sin and salvation of man were far more difficult of solution, than those which beset the mind of the Christian or the skeptic. For our Lord and Saviour knew infallibly how many millions upon millions of the race, for whom he proposed to pour out his life-blood, would reject him. He knew long beforehand how many millions upon millions of this miserable and infatuated race would resist, and ultimately quench, the only Spirit that could renovate and save them. The checkered career of the Christian church, its alternating progress and decline in different ages and countries, the unfaithfulness of his own redeemed, and their lukewarmness in obeying his parting command to evangelize the nations, — the whole career of Christianity, so discouraging in many of its aspects, lay distinct and clear before that omniscient eye. But it did not dampen his love or his ardor (if we may use such a word) for an instant. Even to his own view, much of his love and self-sacrifice would run to waste, so far as the actual redemption of immortal souls is concerned. He knew that, like his prophet, he was to stretch out his hand all day long, yea, ages after ages, to a disobedient and a gainsaying race. But he never faltered, and he never hesitated. He veiled his deity in the “muddy vesture of decay,” and suffered and died in it, with the same willingness and alacrity as if he had foreknown that *every* human soul would have welcomed the great salvation.

Now, if our Lord and Master, knowing infallibly that millions upon millions would trample upon his blood, and that millions upon millions, through the unfaithfulness of his own

church, would never even hear of the passion in Gethsemane and Calvary, — if our Lord and Master, in the face of these discouragements, while sternly as the eternal nemesis of God charging home an infinite guilt upon the human race, yet tenderly as a mother for a child received upon his own person the awful vengeance of that nemesis, we and all his people, in all time, must breathe in his spirit and imitate his example. We have no infinite and infallible knowledge by which to discourage us in our efforts at human salvation. We know not who will reject the message, or whether any will. We can not

“look into the seeds of time,
And say which grain will grow, and which will not.”

We only know that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses all sin from every soul upon whom it drops. And we know that our Redeemer and King has commanded us to proclaim this fact to every human creature. Events and successes are with him. The church has nothing to do but obey orders, like soldiers in a campaign.

The great and the simple work before the church is to sprinkle the nations with the blood of atonement. This it does, instrumentally, when it preaches forgiveness of sins through Christ's oblation. The one great and awful fact in human history, we have seen, is the fact of *guilt*. And the great and glorious fact which the mercy of God has now set over against it, is the fact of *atonement*. It requires no high degree of civilization to apprehend either of these facts. The benighted pagan is as easily convicted as the most highly educated philosopher; and his reception of the atonement of God is, perhaps, even less hindered by pride and prejudice.

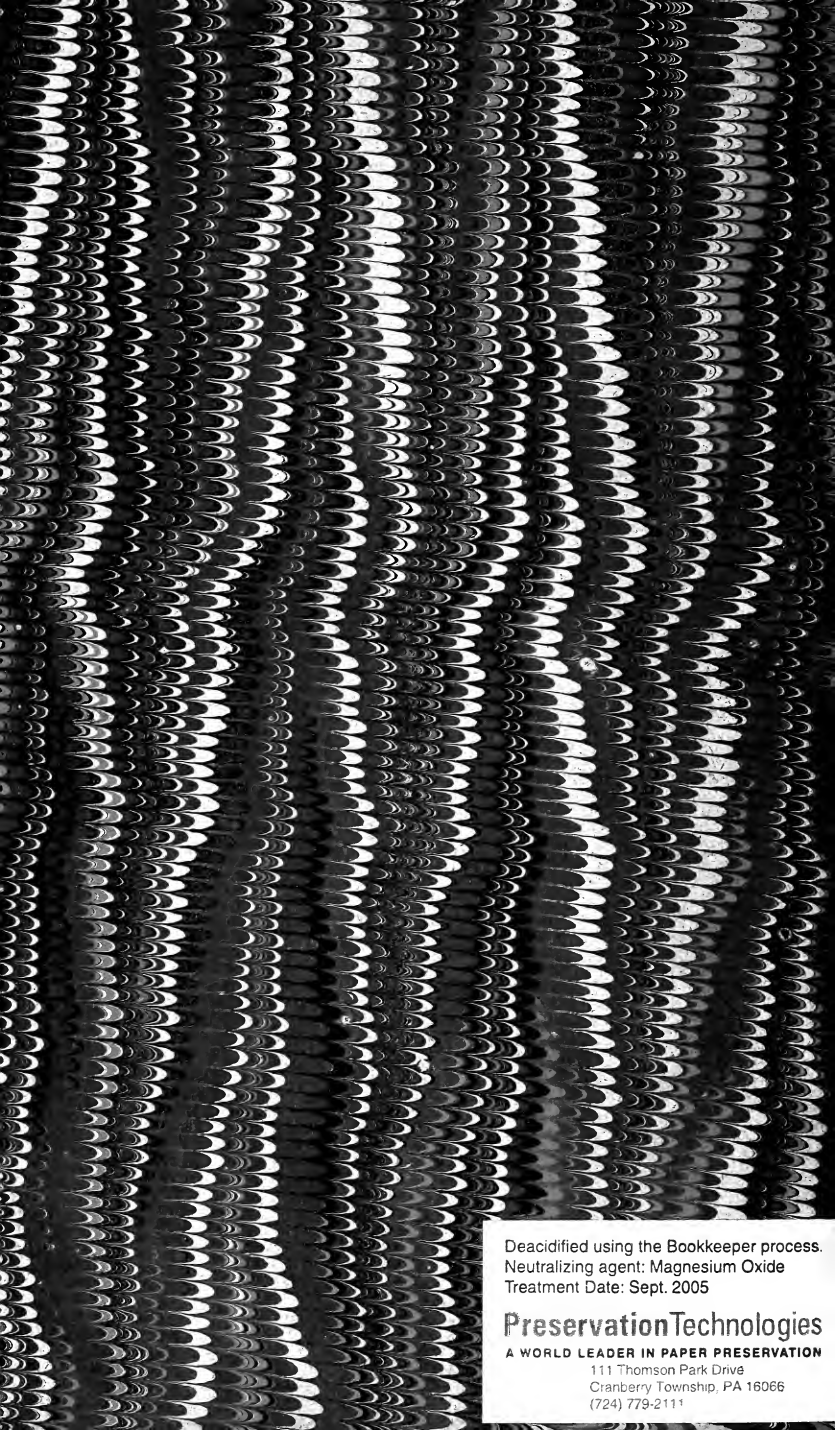
Let the church, therefore, dismissing all secondary and inferior aims, however excellent and desirable in themselves, go forth and proclaim to all the nations that “they are without excuse, because that when they knew God they glorified him not as God;” and also that “God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.”







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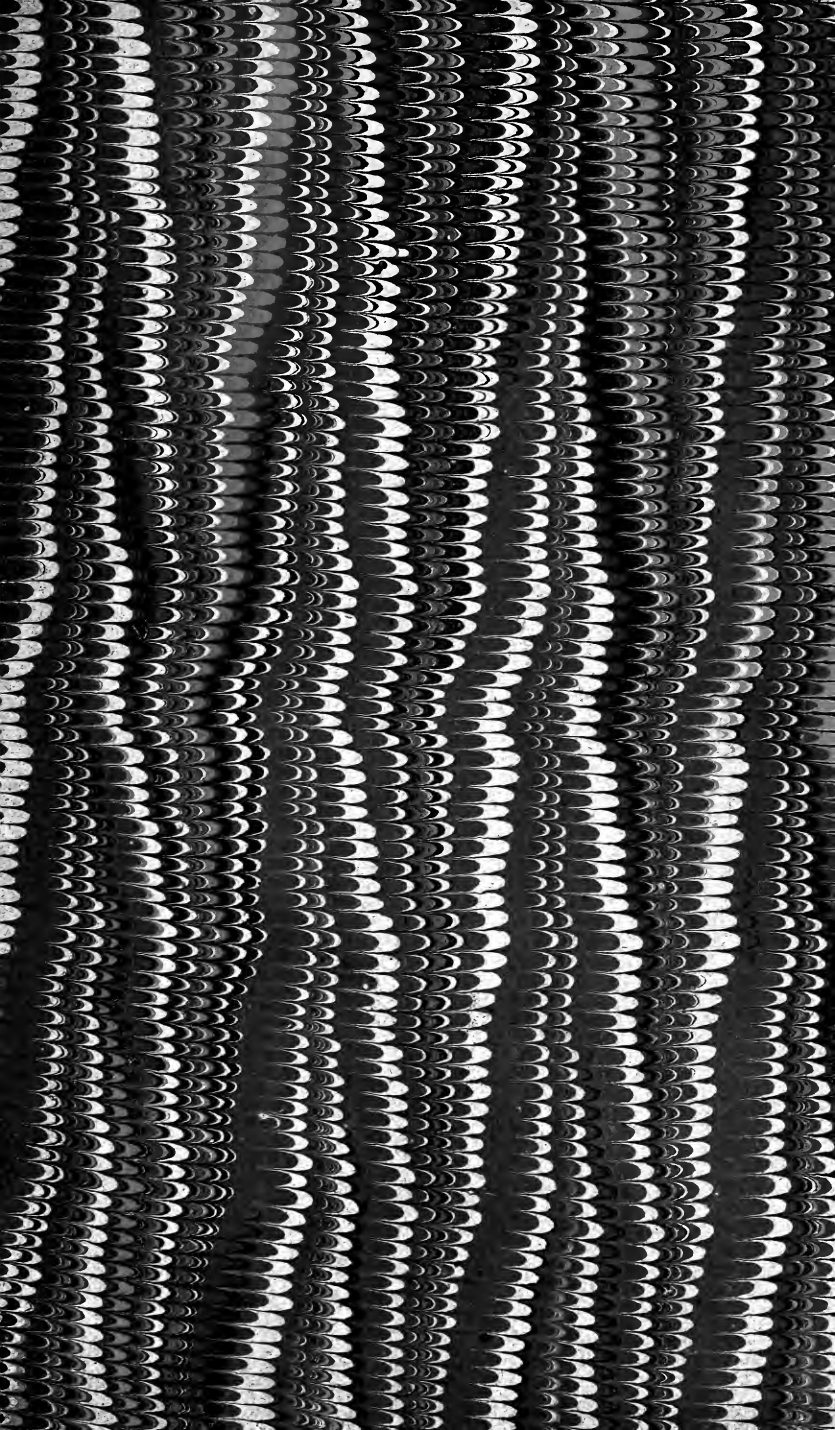


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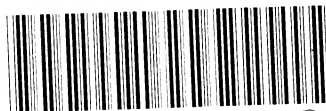
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